CLAIMS:

1.   A control panel unit for a computer system comprising:

a display screen having first and second display regions for displaying first and second soft labels, respectively; and

first and second button inputs located external to the display screen, the first button input configured to display a first viewable state thereon and the second button input configured to display a second viewable state thereon,

wherein the first and second soft labels are associated with and adjacent to the first and second button inputs, respectively and

wherein in a first context, the first viewable state and first soft label represent functionality of the first button input and the second viewable state and the second soft label represent functionality of the second button input, and responsive to actuation of the first button input in the first context, the second viewable state and the second soft label changing to represent the functionality of the second button input in a second context.

2.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein responsive to actuation of the first button input in the first context, the first viewable state and the first soft label changing to represent functionality of the first button input in the second context.

3.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein the first viewable state displayed on the first button input is the same as the second viewable state displayed on the second button input, the first viewable state representing a first action associated with the first button input and the second viewable state representing a second action associated with second button input, the first and second actions being different.

4.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein the first and second viewable states represent first and second actions.

5.   The control panel unit according to claim 4, wherein the first action includes launching an application when the first button input is actuated.

6.   The control panel unit according to claim 5, wherein the application is a messaging, music, calendar or news application.

7.   The control panel unit according to claim 5, wherein the application is launched on a computer coupled to said control panel unit.

8.   The control panel unit according to claim 4, wherein the first and second actions represent responses to an alert.

9.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein the first button input includes at least one illuminable portion for defining the first viewable state.

10.   The control panel unit according to claim 9, wherein the at least one illuminable portion is located on the periphery of the first button input.

11.   The control panel unit according to claim 9, wherein the at least one illuminable portion is an icon located on a central portion of the first button input.

12.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein the first button input includes a portion configured to change color, the first viewable state including a particular color.

13.   The control panel unit according to claim 12, wherein the color represents a specific user of the computer system.

14.   The control panel unit according to claim 1, wherein responsive to actuation of the first button input when data displayed on the display screen is selected, initiating an action associated with the data.

15. A control panel unit for a computer system comprising:

a display having at least first and second display regions;

at least first and second button inputs adjacent to the first and second display regions, respectively; and

first and second soft labels displayed in the first and second display regions, respectively, the first and second soft labels associated with the first and second button inputs, respectively, at least one of the first soft label and the second soft label configured to change in response to actuation of the first button input in a first state,

wherein the first and second soft labels respectively represent first and second users of the computer system.

16. The control panel unit according to claim 15, wherein the first and second soft labels and content on the display are displayed in a format associated with the first user in response to actuation of the first button input in the first state.

17. The control panel unit according to claim 15, wherein the first and second soft labels represent first and second applications associated with the first user in a second state responsive to the first button input being actuated in the first state.

18. The control panel unit according to claim 17, wherein at least one of the applications is a messaging, music, calendar or news application.

19. The control panel unit according to claim 15, wherein the first soft label changes appearance responsive to an event independent of actuation of the first button input.

20. The control panel unit according to claim 19, wherein the event includes receipt of an email message or a calendar event.

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21. The control panel unit according to claim 15, wherein each of the first and second soft labels includes a color specifically associated with the user represented by the respective soft label.

22. The control panel unit according to claim 15, wherein responsive to actuation of the first button input in the first state, the first and second soft labels representing actions customized for the first user.

23. In a computer system having a display screen and first and second button inputs adjacent to the display screen, a method comprising the steps of:

displaying the first button input in a first viewable state and the second button input in a second viewable state, the first and second viewable states representing functionality of the first and second button inputs, respectively, in a first context;

displaying a first soft label in a first display region of the display screen located adjacent to the first button input, the first soft label being associated with the first button input;

displaying a second soft label in a second display region of the display screen located adjacent to the second button input, the second soft label being associated with the second button input; and

responsive to actuation of the first button input, changing the second viewable state and the second soft label to represent the functionality of the second button input in a second context.

24. The method according to claim 23, wherein the first viewable state represents an action.

25. The method according to claim 23, wherein the action represents a response to an alert.

26. The method according to claim 23, wherein the first viewable state represents an application.

27. The method according to claim 26, wherein the application is a messaging, music, calendar or news application.

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28.   The method according to claim 23, wherein the first and second viewable states represent first and second users of the computer system, respectively.

29.   The method according to claim 23, wherein the step of changing the second viewable state includes illuminating or de-illuminating a portion of the second button input.

30.   The method according to claim 29, wherein the step of illuminating or de-illuminating includes illuminating or de-illuminating a peripheral portion of the second button input.

31.   The method according to claim 29, wherein the step of changing the second viewable state includes illuminating or de-illuminating an icon.

32.   The method according to claim 23, wherein the step of changing the second viewable state label includes changing a color of a portion of the second button input.

33.   The method according to claim 23, further including the step of changing the first viewable state and the first soft label responsive to actuation of the first button input.

34.   The method according to claim 33, wherein the first and second viewable states represent first and second actions.

35.   The method according to claim 34, further comprising the step of initiating the first action in response to actuation of the first button input.

36.   In a computer system having at least first and second display regions, and at least first and second button inputs associated with the first and second display regions, respectively, a method comprising the steps of:
        displaying first and second soft labels in the first and second display regions, respectively, the first and second soft labels associated with the first and second button inputs, respectively; and

responsive to actuation of the first button input, changing at least one of the first soft label and the second soft label, wherein in a first state the first and second soft labels respectively represent first and second users of the computer system.

37.   The method according to claim 36, further comprising the step of displaying the first and second soft labels and content in a format associated with the first user responsive to actuation of the first button input in the first state.

38.   The method according to claim 36, wherein the first and second soft labels represent first and second applications associated with the first user in a second state responsive to the first button input being actuated in the first state.

39.   The method according to claim 38, further comprising the step of initiating one of the first application and second application, in response to actuation of one of the first button input and second button input, respectively, in the second state.

40.   The method according to claim 39, further comprising the step of changing the first and second soft labels in response to actuation of the first button input in the second state, the first and second soft labels representing actions associated with the initiated application in a third state.

41.   The method according to claim 36, further comprising the step of changing the appearance of the first soft label responsive to an event independent of actuation of the first button input.

42.   The method according to claim 41, wherein the event includes receipt of an email message.

43.   The method according to claim 41, wherein the event includes occurrence of a calendar event.

44.   The method according to claim 38, wherein one of the first and second applications represents a messaging, music, calendar or audio application.

45.   The method according to claim 36, wherein each of the first and second soft labels includes a color specifically associated with the user represented by the respective soft label.

46.   The method according to claim 45, further comprising displaying the first and second soft labels in the same color responsive to actuation of the first button input in the first state , the color being specifically associated with the first user.

47.   The method according to claim 36, wherein the first and second soft labels represent actions in an alert screen associated with the first user in a second state responsive to the first button input being actuated in the first state.

48.   The method according to claim 47 wherein the alert screen provides a notification message in a third display region.

49.   The method according to claim 47, wherein the alert screen provides a message related to status of the computer system.

50.   In a computer system having at least first and second display regions, and at least first and second button inputs associated with the first and second display regions, respectively, a method comprising the steps of:

        displaying first and second soft labels in the first and second display regions, respectively, the first and second soft labels associated with the first and second button inputs, respectively; and

        responsive to actuation of the first button input, changing the first soft label in the first display region associated with the first button input, and initiating an action involving receiving information via the Internet.

51.   The method according to claim 50, wherein the information includes news.

52.   The method according to claim 50, wherein the information includes stock information, sports information, weather information or traffic information.

53.   The method according to claim 50, wherein the information includes an online chat request.